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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

#### Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, August 1, highlight various issues related to developments in the region, including the attempted assassination of Chalabi in Iraq and preparations for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza.

#### Editorial Commentary on Middle East

-- "Withdrawal from Gaza"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (08/01): "It is difficult for any Palestinian or Arab to object to Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, since its withdrawal from all of the occupied territories is required. But there are those who believe that Sharon's plan for the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza is going to have a negative impact on the Palestinian issue.. Israel's withdrawal from any Palestinian territory is a gain, provided that it is part and parcel of a comprehensive withdrawal from all the occupied Palestinian territories and not the alternative. However, if Israel does not want to withdraw from all of the West Bank, including Jerusalem, then the Palestinians would be better off to keep Gaza an arena for shedding Israeli blood and killing occupation soldiers who exercise state terrorism before the eyes of the entire world. Sharon's plan was not put in place for the good of the Palestinian issue but rather to weaken it, so there is not need to get excited about it."

-- "Returning to the green line"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (08/01) editorializes: "The countdown for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza has started, thus relieving Israel of the burden of its presence in that Strip and relatively relieving the Palestinian of the burden of the occupation.. Yet, there is a difference between this withdrawal being the result of the strong clash with the Palestinian armed groups and the high price that Israel was paying and its being the natural response to and application of the roadmap.. However this withdrawal is seen, the point is that the Palestinian party has won a major point because of its steadfastness. At the same time, however, the Palestinian party is going to be subjected to a great test, and this is because it is expected to appear to the world as being capable of providing a respectable model for national stability where all Palestinian factions come together in the higher good of the Palestinian people.. We really want to believe that the opportunity provided by the Israeli withdrawal is going to mark the beginning of a comprehensive review of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

-- "America's image in the Arab and Muslim world"

Columnist Mohammad Amayreh writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (07/31): "How do we improve the image of the United States in the Arab and Muslim worlds? It is a question that occupies the minds of many in the U.S. administration, and to which the newly appointed U.S. UnderSecretary of State for Public Diplomacy is going to try and find an answer.. The negative image of the United States in the Arab and Muslim worlds is the result of the U.S. policy itself and its unbalanced and unjust exercises, and not the result of media coverage or criticism of the United States by some Arab media outlets."

HALE